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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to replicate an earlier study of attribution of responsibility (Experiment 2 of Samuel et. al, 1981), this research utilized a case study describing an 18-year-old named Johnny who tripped and fell while shoplifting a rifle from a sporting goods store; the gun fired, inflicting either minor or critical injuries on a nearby customer. In the present experiment, the case study was modified to include a new variable--prior conviction--and Johnny was said to have either no police record or a prior conviction for theft. Results showed that responsibility attributed to Johnny, a salesman who had been demonstrating the gun, the customer who was wounded, and a bystanding customer significantly increased as a function of severity of consequences in the No Prior condition. In the Prior condition, however, attributed responsibility significantly decreased as a function of accident severity. A "fair" sentence assigned to Johnny was significantly influenced by both independent variables such that he received the longest sentence in the Severe-Prior condition and the shortest sentence in the Minor-No Prior condition. Subjects' (N=106) locus of control beliefs on a post-administered locus of control (I-E) scale were significantly more "external" when accident consequences were severe rather than minor. In order to further explore the latter phenomenon, the study was replicated using a group (N=137) receiving pre-administration of the I-E scale. As expected, this group's I-E scores were unaffected by the experimental manipulations, but their preliminary exposure to the scale appeared to sensitize them to the contents of the case study. As compared to the post-administration group, they were motivated to be relatively lenient toward Johnny and lacking in empathy toward the wounded and bystanding customers. (Author/JAC)

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Effects of Reading About a Crime Having
Minor or Severe Consequences on
Externality and Attributions of Responsibility

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First Page Note

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ABSTRACT

The research utilized a case study describing an 18 year old named Johnny who tripped and fell while shoplifting a rifle from a sporting goods store; the gun fired, inflicting either minor or critical injuries on a nearby customer. Johnny was said to have either no police record or a prior conviction for theft. It was found that responsibility attributed to Johnny, a salesman who had been demonstrating the gun, the customer who was wounded, and a bystanding customer significantly increased as a function of severity of consequences in the No Prior condition. In the Prior condition, however, attributed responsibility significantly decreased as a function of accident severity. The former results replicated some classic research in this area while the latter seemed consistent with hypotheses derived from general attribution theory by Schroeder and Linder (1976). A "fair" sentence assigned to Johnny was significantly influenced by both independent variables such that he received the longest sentence in the Severe-Prior condition and the shortest in the Minor-No Prior condition. Intriguingly, subjects' locus of control beliefs on a post-administered I-E scale were significantly more "external" when accident consequences were severe rather than minor. In order to further explore the latter phenomenon, the study was replicated using a group receiving pre-administration of the I-E scale. As expected, this group's I-E scores were unaffected by the experimental manipulations, but their preliminary exposure to the scale appeared to sensitize them to the contents of the case study. As compared to the post-administration group, they were motivated to be relatively lenient toward Johnny and lacking in empathy toward the wounded and bystanding customers.

Effects of Reading About a Crime Having
Minor or Severe Consequences on
Externality and Attributions of Responsibility

In a pioneering experiment, Walster (1966) demonstrated that a teen-aged car owner whose vehicle rolled away on a hill was judged more blameworthy when damages were severe rather than minor. Blameworthiness was assessed both in terms of global responsibility and in terms of specific behaviors, such as failing to set the handbrake or to curb the wheels. Evidence of this severity-dependent attribution of responsibility (AR) was found regardless of whether severe damages were inflicted on the teenager's car alone or whether the car crashed into a grocery store and injured the grocer. A sex difference in AR was observed, however, as the potential consequences of the teenager's runaway car became more serious. That is, when a grocery store was at the foot of the hill rather than just a large tree, women assigned relatively high levels of responsibility to the car owner, regardless of the severity of the actual damages.

Walster speculated that disasters constitute a psychological threat, since they are evidence that we ourselves might suffer the same fate. In attributing an extra measure of responsibility to the parties associated with an accident having severe consequences, we may be seeking to defend our egos from the disturbing thought that this could happen to us. Unfortunately, both Walster (1967) and Shaver (1970 a,b) were unable to reproduce this "defensive attribution" of responsibility, but they did discover that severe accidents tend to be regarded as more foreseeable than minor ones. The latter phenomenon was replicated by Samuel, Ahern, and Summers

(1981) and suggested that severity-dependent AR, when it occurs, may be mediated by an exaggerated belief in an actor's potential for foreseeing serious consequences. Observers would thereby feel justified in holding the actor especially accountable for not knowing better than to have become involved.

Though Shaver (1970b) found no significant effect for outcome severity on AR using Walster's original case study, he did observe that his undergraduate subjects were more lenient in assigning blame when the car owner was described as someone similar in age to themselves (i.e., 19 years) rather than as younger (16 years) or older (22 years). In yet another replication, Shaver asked subjects to imagine that they were either very similar to or very different from the car owner in terms of personal beliefs; accident consequences were always described as severe. Consistent with the effects for age described above, a "similar" car owner was rated significantly less responsible for the accident than was a "different" one. Shaver concluded that severity-dependent AR involves several interpretational steps on the part of the observer. First, the observer must perceive the accident situation as relevant; that is, as one which he or she might plausibly encounter. Second, the observer must be able to differentiate the parties to the accident from him- or herself in terms of personal characteristics. If we perceive these parties as being very similar to ourselves, ego defensive motives will lead us to deny that they could be responsible for a disastrous outcome instead of holding them especially accountable for it. It is particularly when we witness personally dissimilar others involved in a relevant accident situation having severe consequences that we will be motivated to attribute high levels of blame. Shaver argued that Walster (1967) probably failed to replicate her earlier findings because the case

studies used in the later research described homeowners who were victimized by economic conditions or mudslides and so may not have been situationally relevant to her undergraduate subjects.

Several studies have supported Shaver's hypothesis that relevance and similarity are critical variables in AR. Speaking to the relevance variable is a study by Chaikin and Darley (1973) showing that subjects will attribute a relatively high degree of blame to either the victim or the perpetrator of a severe accident, depending on whether they identify with a perpetrator- or victim-like role, respectively. Comparable results were reported by Harvey, Harris, and Barnes (1975). The importance of similarity for AR was demonstrated by McKillip and Posavac (1975), who found that regular marijuana users were notably lenient relative to "ambivalents" or "abstainers" when assigning blame to a young man who crashed into a lightpost while driving home from a party at which he had smoked marijuana. In a second study, these authors manipulated perceived similarity by describing the young man as having attitudes and values very close to or distant from those of the subjects. When the young man was described as very different, AR was greater following severe than minor consequences (in which the car skidded to a stop before hitting the lightpost). When the young man was described as very similar, however, AR was significantly less following severe than minor consequences. Comparable effects were reported by Shaw and McMartin (1977), though Lowe and Medway (1976) found a reliably greater increase in AR with increasing accident severity for subjects evaluating a similar rather than a dissimilar accident perpetrator.

An alternative explanation for Walster's (1967) failure to

replicate her original results was offered by Phares and Wilson (1972). They distinguished between the case studies used in these experiments along a dimension of structuredness versus ambiguity. Walster's (1966) runaway automobile situation was regarded by these researchers as fairly structured, in that the teen-aged car owner was legally responsible for maintaining his brakes in a safe condition and for parking properly. The homeowner case studies used in Walster's (1967) replication, however, were regarded by Phares and Wilson as rather ambiguous, in that no one was directly accountable for the economic or natural forces which lowered these persons' property values. A new accident situation devised by Shaver (1970b), in which the malfunction of an industrial machine caused minor or severe damages to a child visitor to the plant, was also regarded as ambiguous by Phares and Wilson because the legal liability of the machine operator versus that of the industrial plant was unclear. This case study also failed to replicate Walster's finding of severity-dependent AR.

Phares and Wilson concluded that severity-dependent AR is most likely to be observed in structured rather than ambiguous accident situations. They devised a structured situation of their own in which a speeding driver passed a stopped school bus and struck a child, inflicting either minor (cuts and bruises) or severe (multiple fractures) injuries. In an ambiguous situation, a bale of hay fell off a farm truck, causing the driver of a following car to swerve across the center line, side-swiping another vehicle and causing minor or severe injuries to its occupant. As predicted, severity-dependent AR was found

only in the structured accident situation. In addition, it was reported that subjects having a relatively strong belief in internal locus of control, as measured by Rotter's (1966) I-E scale, assigned higher levels of responsibility than did their more externally-oriented counterparts, regardless of the structuredness or ambiguity of the accident situation.

Schroeder and Linder (1976, p. 343) consulted Kelley's (1967) theory of attributional processes in person perception to derive yet another hypothesis regarding the circumstances under which severity-dependent AR is likely to be observed:

The observer must first perceive the actor as a primary causal agent of events for which the observer would not want to be blamed. Then, motivated by a need to avoid personal feelings of blameworthiness or vulnerability, the observer assigns a minimized degree of responsibility to the actor. Somewhat paradoxically, therefore, exactly those circumstances that heighten perceptions of the actor's causal role in an accident will lead to defensively lenient assignments of responsibility.

According to this line of reasoning, Walster was fortunate to have observed an increase in AR with increasing accident severity; this must have occurred because subjects perceived situational rather than personal factors to have been the primary causal agents of the accident. Most of the failures to replicate Walster's original results have, according to Schroeder and Linder, inadvertently emphasized the personal factors contributing to a severe accident outcome and so motivated subjects to be lenient rather than blaming in their attributions.

Schroeder and Linder's hypothesis appears directly contradictory to that of Phares and Wilson and, hence, unable to explain the results of their research. Even so, it may well be the case that severity-dependent AR has multiple determinants which are not comprehensively described by any of the competing hypotheses in this area. Anyway, Schroeder and Linder tested their reasoning by utilizing Shaver's (1970b) industrial accident case study. They added to the situation the variable of few or many similar accidents having occurred during the preceding year. It was found that when many similar accidents had occurred in the plant, AR to the machine operator tended to increase with increasing severity of consequences. When few similar accidents had previously occurred, however (thus making personal rather than situational factors more salient), AR significantly decreased with increasing severity of consequences.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1973) outlined a theoretical model for attribution of responsibility which assumes that people habitually assign blame to others depending upon the level to which their own moral development has progressed. A given situational context may imply that an actor was merely associated with an event, that he or she foresaw and/or instigated the event, that the actor behaved unjustifiably, or that the behavior was intentional. A person at the most primitive level of moral development will assign blame to the actor in all the foregoing contexts while someone at the allegedly most sophisticated level of development will assign blame only if an actor's behavior was unjustifiable and intentional. Fishbein and Ajzen believe that the failure to specify the contextual level of responsibility implied in experimental stimulus materials and the

failure to identify the developmental level at which subjects are responding have interacted so as to produce a seemingly inconsistent body of results. Then again, Medway and Lowe (1975, p. 245) commented that if researchers adopted the specialized dependent measures for foreseeability, intentionality, justification, and moral development advocated by Fishbein and Ajzen, the results generated by these procedures would probably "prove to be just as ambiguous as the more general measures of inference used in previous studies."

Discussions of severity-dependent AR seem naturally to draw one's thinking toward the assessment of culpability in a criminal justice context and recommendations for punishment that "fits" the crime. Surprisingly, relatively few studies have been done which speak directly to those issues, and those that do are often specifically concerned with rape cases. Jones and Aronson (1973) asked subjects to read an account of the rape of a university coed. In ratings of fault attributed to the victim, subjects were interpreted as saying that she was less "damaged" by the rape if she had been described as a divorcee rather than as a married woman or unwed virgin. Accordingly, subjects recommend the shortest prison term for the rapist of a divorcee. Scroggs (1976) manipulated damages in a rape case by telling subjects that the victim either did or did not become pregnant. The prison sentence recommended for the rapist was unaffected by damages among the undergraduate subjects but increased significantly as a function of damages within a sample comprising the parents or grandparents of these subjects. Krulewitz and Nash (1979) found, as one would expect, that a

longer sentence was recommended for the perpetrator of a completed rape as opposed to an attempted rape. Paradoxically, AR to the assailant decreased from an attempted to a completed rape whereas AR to the victim significantly increased.

Both Scroggs (1976) and Krulewitz and Nash (1979) reported complex interactions between the sex of the subject and the manipulated variable of degree of victim resistance in data on the recommended sentence for the rapist and on fault attributed to the victim, respectively. A detailed examination of these interactions would be tangential to the main purposes of this paper, so we will suffice it to say that what research has been conducted on AR in a criminal justice context generally supports the view that AR and recommendations for punishment increase with increasing severity of consequences.

To summarize, it seems reasonable to say, as did Burger (1981) in an extensive review of the literature on severity-dependent AR, that there is evidence of a weak overall tendency for AR to increase as accident consequences become more severe. The literature is very complex, however, and this overall tendency has frequently been found to interact with other variables or to be canceled or reversed following what would appear superficially to be relatively small changes in the wording of a case study.

One problem that must be more carefully considered in future research in this area is the frequent confounding of accident consequences with accident content. That is, in some studies a severe accident differs from a minor one not only in the magnitude

of its consequences but also in the contributory actions of the parties involved. Someone who crashed into a lightpost, for example, may be reasonably assumed to have been driving more recklessly than someone who managed to skid to a stop before hitting it (McKillip & Posavac, 1975). Even a driver who is described in all conditions of an experiment as having hit a child while passing a school bus may, on some rational grounds, be assumed to have been less careful about what he was doing if the incident resulted in critical injuries to the victim rather than cuts and bruises (Phares & Wilson, 1972). More obviously, a rapist who completed his assault must have behaved differently than one who unsuccessfully made the attempt (Krulowitz & Nash, 1979). Other researchers have also, to a lesser or greater degree, confounded accident outcome and accident content in their case studies (Gleason & Harris, 1976; Lowe & Medway, 1976; Medway & Lowe, 1975). The defensive attribution hypothesis originally referred to a distortion of reality motivated by an observer's desire to minimize the ego-threatening implications of severe accident consequences. In order for a tight test of this hypothesis to be made, it is essential that accident content be held constant with only the consequences being systematically varied.

The research reported in the present paper satisfied the above methodological requirement. One of its purposes was to replicate Experiment 2 of Samuel et al. (1981), which utilized a case study describing an 18 year old named Johnny who tripped and fell while shoplifting a hunting rifle from a crowded sporting goods store. The rifle discharged and inflicted either superficial or critical injuries on a nearby customer. In the present experiment, there was added to

this case study, in some conditions, a citation from police records showing that Johnny had a prior conviction for theft.

Samuel et al. (1981) found a statistically marginal ($p < .10$) increase in AR to all parties associated with a severe accident relative to what they were assigned when consequences were minor. This result was expected to be reproduced in the No Prior condition of the present study. The effects of the prior conviction manipulation were difficult to predict. If, following Shaver's (1970b) line of thinking, a prior record would make Johnny appear more dissimilar to the observers, one might anticipate a strengthening of the main effect predicted for the No Prior conditions. If Johnny's prior conviction served to make the situation appear more structured in subjects' minds--in the sense that Johnny would be more clearly perceived as the primary instigator of the incident--then Phares and Wilson (1972), too, would expect to see a strengthening of the main effect predicted for the No Prior condition. On the other hand, if news of Johnny's prior conviction made personal rather than situational factors more salient in subjects' minds, one might, according to Schroeder and Linder's (1976) reasoning, anticipate that increasing severity of consequences would motivate subjects to become lenient rather than blaming in their attributions. Thus AR could actually be less following severe rather than minor consequences in the Prior conditions.

The present research, therefore, sought to extend the AR literature more directly into a criminal justice context than has generally been attempted and to give this application a broader focus than that provided by the rape cases mentioned earlier. In addition, we were interested in what effects a new variable--prior conviction--would have on the severity-

dependent AR found in previous work using the same case study employed here.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 37 male and 72 female undergraduates fulfilling a research participation requirement in introductory psychology during the Spring 1981 semester and 35 male and 103 female undergraduates fulfilling a similar requirement during the Fall 1982 semester. The data for one male and two female subjects were discarded from the 1981 sample due to improper completion of the questionnaires. Data for one female subject were discarded from the 1982 sample due to her refusal to complete the I-E scale.

Procedure

Subjects were run in groups ranging in size from 10 to 35 people. At each session, the four versions of the independent variable, typed so as to appear identical and disguised by a standardized cover sheet, were randomly distributed.

The research was introduced as a study of people's reactions to current events, and the case study was alleged to have been adapted from a newspaper account of a real-life incident. At the experimenter's signal, all subjects turned the cover page and read the case study. If they finished before three minutes had elapsed they were asked to reread the case study until the experimenter gave the signal to turn to the questionnaire. Subjects were seated at a comfortable distance from one another and were cautioned not to talk among themselves while filling out the questionnaire.

The case study involved the theft of a rifle from a crowded sporting goods store on a Saturday afternoon. The guilty party, an impoverished 18 year old named Johnny, tripped and fell while shoplifting the gun, and it discharged, wounding a nearby customer. This customer and a bystanding customer had been discussing the rifle with a salesman, who had set the gun aside on the counter while he showed the customers an advertising brochure. Unknown to the salesman, another store employee had inadvertently left a live cartridge in the weapon. During the time that the salesman and the customers were distracted by the brochure, Johnny grabbed the rifle and ran for the door. The gun was fired when Johnny tripped over an aisle display. In the minor consequences condition, one of the customers talking with the salesman was superficially wounded in the right arm and, after some first aid treatment at a nearby hospital, was released in good health. In the severe consequences condition, this customer was wounded in the back and critically injured; two months later the customer was still hospitalized and trying to overcome a partial paralysis of the legs. The sex of the wounded and bystanding customers was deliberately left unspecified in the case study.

In the first paragraph of the case study, it was noted that Johnny either "had no police record and said that he had never before committed a crime" or that "police records showed that he was convicted of theft as a juvenile but received a suspended sentence." The experimental design was thus a 2 x 2 factorial manipulating severity of consequences (Minor vs. Severe) and prior record (No Prior vs. Prior).

On the questionnaire, subjects used a scale running from "Not at all" (0) to "Extremely" (10) to evaluate the seriousness of the consequences of the accident, how foreseeable it was that someone might be shot at the moment the salesman set the gun aside on the counter, and how much responsibility for the accident could be attributed to Johnny, the salesman, and the bystanding and wounded customers. Subjects also divided up the total responsibility for the accident into percentage shares for each of the parties plus a share for "bad luck" and a share for "other factors" the subject might care to specify. These percentages were required to add up to 100%. Subjects were then told that Johnny was charged with shoplifting and with assault involving use of a deadly weapon and that, upon conviction, the maximum sentence for shoplifting alone would be six months, the maximum for assault alone would be 24 months, and the maximum on both counts would be 30 months. Subjects were asked to recommend an "appropriate" sentence for Johnny on a scale ranging from 0 months (parole) to 30 months. Participants next evaluated the extent to which they believed that youthful offenders make a personal choice to commit crimes or that this behavior is virtually forced upon them by a crime-producing environment. The scale ran from "Strongly believe the environment produces youthful offenders" (-2) to "Believe that environmental and personal factors are equally important" (0) to "Strongly believe youthful offenders have made a personal choice" (+2).

For subjects in the 1982 experiment only, the questionnaire continued with an item designed to measure the perceived "structuredness" of the accident:

Accidents may be said to differ from one another along a dimension of structuredness vs. ambiguity. A highly structured accident is one in which one or more of the parties involved in it would be held clearly accountable if the case came to court. A highly ambiguous accident is one in which none of the parties involved is clearly legally liable for its occurrence. How would you rate the structuredness vs. ambiguity of the accident you just read about?

The scale ran from "highly ambiguous" (1) to "Highly structured" (7). Another item sought to assess the degree to which subjects perceived personal versus situational factors as causes of the accident's occurrence:

Accidents also may be said to differ from one another in the degree to which personal vs. situational factors contributed to their occurrence. Personal factors consist in the actions voluntarily initiated by various parties to the accident which intentionally or unintentionally helped bring it about. Situational factors consist in environmental circumstances that compelled the parties to behave as they did or that caused events to follow one another in a sequence leading to the accident's occurrence. How would you rate the extent to which personal or situational factors contributed to the occurrence of the accident you just read about?

This scale ran from "only personal factors" (1) to "Only situational factors" (7). Finally, on a scale running from "Not at all" (1) to "Extremely" (10), subjects estimated how similar in terms of personality and outlook on life they were to Johnny, the salesman, and the two customers. They also evaluated how likely it was that they might someday find themselves playing a role similar to that of each of these parties in an accident situation similar to the one described in the case study.

For all subjects run during the Spring 1981 semester and for half the subjects run during the Fall 1982 semester, the questionnaires were collected once they had been completed, and Rotter's (1966) I-E scale for measuring belief in internal versus external control of reinforcement was distributed. The I-E scale was thus placed in the position of being more a dependent measure than, as in most studies, a device for preselecting subjects into "internal" and "external" groups. This was done because: 1) it was impractical to administer the scale to students in their classes prior to the experiment, and 2) it was feared that administering the I-E scale at the outset of the experiment might in some way influence the results, thereby spoiling our replication of the earlier study. Because the 1981 data showed a significant effect of the experimental manipulations on I-E scores, the 1982 sample included 20 males and 49 females who were administered the I-E scale at the outset of the experiment, prior to reading the case study or examining the questionnaire.

At the conclusion of each session, there was a brief explanation of the purposes and procedures of the research and an opportunity to ask questions. Subjects were then sworn to secrecy for the duration of the project, thanked for their participation, and released.

RESULTS

All analyses included sex of subject among the independent variables. While sex of subject did sometimes significantly interact with the severity and/or prior record variables in influencing subjects' responses to the dependent measures, the patterning of mean scores was

generally very similar for male and female subjects. Those cases in which there were significant interactions involving the sex of subject variable will be explained in footnotes.

Since post-administration of the I-E scale was a procedure applied to all subjects in the 1981 sample and 15 male and 53 female subjects in the 1982 sample, a preliminary analysis was conducted to see if the 1982 results replicated the earlier findings. Significant effects involving this "replication" factor appeared in analyses of just 5 out of 15 dependent measures. These effects were all interactions, and for three of the five dependent measures the interactions were third-order or higher. Overall, the differences between the data sets were primarily ones of degree rather than direction. Since the 1982 results for the groups receiving post-administration of the I-E scale were so similar to those for the 1981 sample, the data sets have been combined in the analyses which follow.¹

The first question to be addressed in our examination of the results will be whether or not pre-administration of the I-E scale had a significant influence on the data. As will be shown below, the answer to this question is yes. Consequently, we will next focus our attention on the data gathered from subjects receiving post-administration of the I-E scale to see most clearly what effects the experimental manipulations had on the results.

Effects of Pre-Administration of the I-E Scale

Severity and Foreseeability. Regardless of the timing of the I-E scale, subjects who read that the wounded customer suffered critical

injuries rated the accident consequences as much more severe than did subjects who read that the customer's injuries were superficial ($F = 124.51$, $1/227$ df, $p < .001$). A main effect for the Pre-Post factor indicated that subjects in the Pre group perceived the accident as more severe ($M = 7.76$) than did subjects in the Post group ($M = 7.21$; $F = 4.37$, $1/227$ df, $p < .05$).² No significant effects were found for the foreseeability measure.

Responsibility. No significant effects involving the Pre-Post variable were found in analyses of AR to Johnny or the salesman. In AR to the bystanding and wounded customers, however, there were significant or marginal interactions between Severity, Prior Record, and the Pre-Post factor ($F_s = 4.64$ and 2.92 , $1/227$ df, $p < .05$ and $p < .10$, respectively). The interaction developed from the fact that subjects in the Pre group assigned a greater amount of responsibility to the bystanding and wounded customers in the Severe-Prior condition than in any other condition ($M = 0.35$ relative to a grand mean of $.10$ and $M = 0.41$ relative to a grand mean of $.19$, respectively), while subjects in the Post group assigned the least amount of responsibility to the customers under these circumstances ($M = 0.07$ for each relative to grand means of $.18$ and $.21$ respectively).

Percentage Responsibility. Pre subjects assigned Johnny a smaller percentage share of responsibility when accident consequences were severe ($M = 34.03$) rather than minor ($M = 56.06$) whereas Post subjects assigned a greater share of blame in the former ($M = 54.91$) than in the latter ($M = 49.54$) condition. This pattern of results produced a significant

interaction between the Severity and Pre-Post variables in the data for Johnny's percentage AR ($F = 6.16$, $1/227$ df, $p < .02$). At the same time that they were reluctant to blame Johnny for severe accident consequences, subjects in the Pre group assigned a relatively high percentage share of responsibility to "other" factors under these circumstances ($M = 20.24$) as opposed to when accident consequences were minor ($M = 9.40$). Subjects in the Post group assigned about the same percentage share of blame to other factors when consequences were severe ($M = 10.32$) as when they were minor ($M = 11.36$). The Severity x Pre-Post interaction was marginally significant ($F = 3.30$ $1/227$, df, $p = .07$).

Recommended sentence and beliefs regarding juvenile crime. The number of months in jail recommended for Johnny by subjects in the Pre group was approximately the same in the Severe ($M = 15.08$) as in the Minor (14.97) conditions. Subjects in the Post group, however, assigned Johnny a somewhat longer sentence when accident consequences were severe ($M = 16.52$) rather than minor ($M = 12.08$). This pattern of results produced a significant Severity x Pre-Post interaction in the sentencing data ($F = 3.89$, $1/227$ df, $p < .05$). The Pre-Post variable had no significant effect on subjects' beliefs regarding the personal vs. environmental causes of juvenile crime.

Belief in external locus of control. Within the Pre group, as one would expect, externality was unaffected by the severe ($M = 9.94$) or minor ($M = 10.37$) consequences described in the subsequently read accident case study. Within the Post group, however, externality scores were considerably higher among subjects who had just read about severe

($M = 10.54$) rather than minor ($M = 9.02$) consequences. This pattern of results produced a near-significant Severity x Pre-Post interaction ($F = 3.55$, $1/215$ df, $p = .06$).³ The cell means for externality are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

A separate analysis of the Pre group data turned up no significant effects (all $F_s \leq 2.31$). In a separate analysis of the Post group data, though, there was found a highly significant main effect for accident severity ($F = 6.69$, $1/154$ df, $p < .01$).

Accident structuredness and the role of situational factors. No significant effects involving the Pre-Post variable were found in ratings of the accidents structuredness or the extent to which personal vs. situational factors influenced its occurrence. It may be recalled that for these and subsequent dependent measures, the Post group included just 68 subjects from the 1982 experiment.

Similarity to various parties. The Pre-Post variable did not significantly influence subjects' perceptions of their similarity to Johnny or the salesman. Subjects in the Pre group, though, rated themselves less similar to the bystanding and wounded customers when accident consequences were severe ($M = 2.91$ and 3.21 respectively) rather than minor ($M = 4.98$ and 4.33 respectively). By contrast, subjects in the Post group rated themselves more similar to the bystanding and wounded customers when accident consequences were severe ($M = 4.27$ and 3.97 respectively) rather than minor ($M = 3.39$ and 3.15 respectively). Consequently, there were significant Severity x Pre-Post interactions

in subjects' ratings of their similarity to the bystanding and wounded customers ($F = 10.64$ and 4.12 , $1/117$ df , $ps < .05$, respectively). One subject in the Pre and two in the Post group did not complete these ratings.

Role identification with various parties. The Pre-Post variable did not significantly influence subjects' self-rated identification with the role played by Johnny or the salesman in the accident case study. Subjects in the Pre group, however, felt less able to identify with the role of the bystanding or wounded customers when accident consequences were severe ($M = 3.63$ and 3.27 respectively) rather than minor ($M = 5.57$ and 4.28 respectively). Subjects in the Post group felt more able to identify with the bystanding or wounded customer in the Severe ($M = 4.27$ and 3.97 respectively) than in the minor ($M = 3.39$ and 3.15 respectively) accident conditions. The Severity x Pre-Post interactions were marginally significant for self-rated identification with the roles of the bystanding and wounded customers ($F = 3.88$ and 3.41 , $1/120$ df , $ps < .07$ respectively).⁴

Summary of Findings. It appears that pre-administration of the I-E scale did have a consistent influence on subjects' reactions to the case study. As compared to subjects receiving the I-E scale at the conclusion of the experiment, Pre subjects who read about severe accident consequences appeared to be oriented toward leniency in their evaluations of Johnny. They assigned him a smaller percentage share of responsibility for the accident and recommended a shorter jail term for him. At the same time, they tended to be unsympathetic toward the wounded and bystanding customers. Pre subjects rated themselves less similar to and less likely to find themselves in the same situation as these parties

and also assigned them a relatively high degree of responsibility for the accident in the Severe-Prior condition.

It is conceivable that the items on the I-E scale reminded subjects of the powerful influence that bad luck and adverse environmental circumstances can exert over a person's life. Such thoughts could have induced subjects to be lenient toward Johnny when the stray bullet from what Johnny assumed to be an unloaded gun happened to cause critical injuries to a nearby customer. In order to be lenient toward Johnny, subjects may have found it psychologically necessary to curtail their empathy for the wounded customer and for the bystander who, by fate alone, escaped injury. Supporting this interpretation is the observation that, among Pre subjects, externality was positively correlated with attributions to bad luck ($r = .30, p < .01$) and situational factors ($r = .23, p < .05$) whereas these correlations were negligible among subjects in the Post group ($r_s = .06$ and $-.01$ respectively). In any event, regardless of the psychological mediators, it seems clear that pre-administration of the I-E scale had a sensitizing effect on subjects which influenced how they responded to the accident case study. Consequently, in our examination of the effects of the independent variables on subjects' responses to the case study, we will restrict our attention to subjects whose data are uncontaminated by such sensitizing influences; i.e., we will restrict our attention to data from the Post group only.

Effects of the Experimental Manipulations
on Subjects Receiving Post-Administration
of the I-E Scale

As before, cases in which there were significant interactions involving the sex of the subject variable will be explained in footnotes.

Responsibility. The mean degree of responsibility attributed to all parties is shown in Table 2. A four-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with four repeated measures on the last factor was performed on these data to examine the effects of accident severity, prior record, and sex of subject on the responsibility attributed to the various parties to the incident.

Insert Table 2 about here

There was a significant interaction between the severity and prior record variables ($F = 9.41, 1/166 \text{ df}, p < .01$). This interaction arose from the fact that in the No Prior conditions, responsibility attributed to all parties (with the slight exception of the wounded customer) was greater following severe rather than minor consequences whereas the reverse was true in the Prior conditions. A main effect for Party demonstrated, as expected, that the highest level of responsibility was assigned to Johnny, the guilty party, followed by the semi-guilty salesman, with very little responsibility being assigned to the two customers ($F = 515.36, 3/498 \text{ df}, p < .001$).⁵

The No Prior conditions constitute a replication of Experiment 2 in Samuel et al. (1981), where it was also stated that Johnny "had never

before committed a crime." Consequently, a separate three-way ANOVA with repeated measures on the third factor was conducted for the No Prior conditions, and a significant main effect for Severity was obtained ($F = 4.62$, $1/82$ df, $p < .05$). This effect interacted with the party being rated, indicating that it was strongest in ratings of Johnny, less strong in ratings of the salesman, and negligible in ratings of the two customers ($F = 2.54$, $3/246$ df, $p < .06$).⁶

A separate three-way ANOVA performed on data for the Prior conditions turned up a main effect for severity that was opposite in direction to that described above. Namely, less responsibility was assigned to all parties when accident consequences were severe rather than minor ($F = 4.97$, $1/84$ df, $p < .05$). This effect did not interact with the party being rated ($F < 1$).

Percentage Responsibility. The percentage share of responsibility attributed to each of the parties to the incident was highly variable and did not differ significantly between conditions. The overall shares were as follows: Johnny (52.3%), salesman (27.3%), bystanding customer (0.6%), wounded customer (1.1%), bad luck (8.4%), other (10.8%).⁷

Recommended sentence and beliefs regarding juvenile crime. The sentences recommended for Johnny in each of the four conditions are shown in Table 3. Significant main effects were found for the variables of severity ($F = 12.61$, $1/166$ df, $p < .01$) and prior record ($F = 11.33$, $1/166$ df, $p < .01$), reflecting the fact that Johnny was assigned the

Insert Table 3 about here

longest sentence ($\bar{M}$ = 17.7 months) in the Severe-Prior condition and the shortest sentence in the Minor-No Prior condition ($\bar{M}$ = 9.2 months). There were no significant effects of either the severity or prior record variables on beliefs that youthful offenders like Johnny have made a personal choice to commit crimes ($F_s \leq 1.74$).

Belief in external locus of control. Subjects' mean scores on the I-E scale are shown in the right half of Table 1. A highly reliable main effect for severity revealed that subjects become more externally oriented in their beliefs following exposure to an accident having severe consequences ($F = 6.69$, 1/154 df , $p < .01$). This main effect did not significantly interact with either the prior record or the sex of subject variables.⁸

Accident structuredness and the role of situational factors. No significant effects were found in analyses of subjects' ratings of the accident's structuredness or the extent to which personal vs. situational factors influenced its occurrence (all $F_s \leq 2.44$). It should be recalled that for these and subsequent dependent measures, the sample consisted in just 68 subjects receiving post-administration of the I-E scale in the 1982 experiment.

Similarity to various parties. Subjects felt less similar to Johnny when he had a prior record ($\bar{M}$ = 0.55) than when he did not ($\bar{M}$ = 1.27; $F = 4.75$, 1/58 df , $p < .05$).⁹ There was a near-significant main effect indicating that subjects felt more similar to the salesman when accident consequences were severe ($\bar{M}$ = 3.82) rather than minor ($\bar{M}$ = 2.78; $F = 3.68$, 1/58 df , $p < .06$).¹⁰ No significant effects were

found in subjects' ratings of similarity to the bystanding and wounded customers.

Role identification with various parties. Subjects were less able to imagine themselves in a role like Johnny's when he had a prior record ($\bar{M} = 0.14$) than when he did not ($\bar{M} = 0.88$; $F = 7.07$, $1/60$ df, $p < .01$). There was a significant main effect indicating that subjects felt better able to identify with the salesman's role when accident consequences were severe ($\bar{M} = 3.73$) rather than minor ($\bar{M} = 2.21$; $F = 6.30$, $1/60$ df, $p < .02$).¹¹ No significant effects were found in subjects' ratings of the extent to which they could identify with the role of the bystanding or wounded customer in the accident case study.

DISCUSSION

In the No Prior conditions, the results for attributed responsibility provided a nearly exact replication of Experiment 2 in Samuel et al. (1981) and a conceptual replication of Walster's (1966) original hypothesis. Unlike Walster (1967), Shaver (1970b), and Samuel et al. (1981), we did not find that severe accidents were perceived as more foreseeable than minor ones; what trend there was in these data went in the opposite direction.

The results for the Prior conditions also showed strong evidence of severity-dependent AR, but the direction of the effect was reversed from that found in the No Prior conditions. This trend toward leniency following severe accident consequences cannot be very easily accounted for by Shaver's (1970b) defensive attribution hypothesis. Subjects perceived themselves to be less similar to Johnny in the Prior than

in the No Prior conditions. It is the dissimilar accident perpetrator who is, in Shaver's reasoning, most likely to be the target of increasing blame with increasing severity of consequences, but the opposite effect is what was found here. Shaver could reply that subjects also rated themselves as less likely to find themselves in a situation like Johnny's when they read that he had a prior record as opposed to when he did not. Thus, the accident could have appeared less relevant to subjects in the Prior rather than in the No Prior conditions. According to Shaver, increased AR with increasing severity of accident consequences is unlikely to be observed when subjects do not perceive the context as being personally relevant.

The mediating factor of structuredness versus ambiguity proposed by Phares and Wilson (1972) would also have a difficult time explaining these data. According to Phares and Wilson, the perpetrator of a severe as opposed to a minor accident is most likely to be regarded as especially blameworthy when the situation is a structured one. We did not find a significant effect of the experimental manipulations on the perceived structuredness of the accident among subjects receiving post-administration of the I-E scale, but this could have been due to the relatively small sample size. When the data for the Pre group, who also completed this item, were combined with those from the Post group, a significant main effect for prior record was observed ($F = 6.62, 1/119$ df, $p < .01$). Subjects in the Prior condition perceived the accident situation as more structured ($M = 4.65$) than did subjects in the No Prior condition ($M = 4.00$). Once again, the evidence bearing on subjects'

perceptions of the accident suggests that we should have been more likely to find increased AR with increasing severity of consequences in the Prior than in the No Prior conditions, but the opposite effect is what was actually observed.

Schroeder and Linder's (1976) idea that a case study's emphasis on the personal versus situational components of an accident outcome may have a considerable effect on the magnitude and direction of severity-dependent AR does find support in these results. News of Johnny's prior conviction could plausibly have made personal causes appear more salient than situational causes when subjects read the accident case study. If so, then subjects might, by Schroeder and Linder's reasoning, have been motivated to be judgmentally lenient when attributing responsibility to various parties to the incident. This could have occurred because the subjects had relatives or friends who seemed similar to Johnny or because subjects could identify with the unsuspecting salesman and customers. Unfortunately, the data on subjects' perceptions do not provide much support for this line of reasoning. Causal attributions to situational factors were not stronger in the Prior than in the No Prior conditions and ratings of similarity to or role identification with the salesman and the two customers did not differ even marginally significantly as a function of Johnny's prior record. Then again, one often does not know what to make of null findings. It is conceivable that Johnny's prior record did influence subjects' perceptions in the manner proposed above but that our dependent measures were not sensitive enough to detect these changes. All in all, our data are more consistent with those reported by Schroeder and Linder

(1976) than with the findings and theoretical formulations of Shaver (1970b) or Phares and Wilson (1972).

Unlike Phares and Wilson (1972), we did not find that externals were consistently more likely than internals to attribute responsibility to situational factors and, for this reason, to be lenient toward an accident perpetrator. Externality was uncorrelated with AR to any of the parties in both the Pre group (r_s ranged from $-.11$ to $+.10$) and the Post group (r_s ranged from $-.05$ to $+.10$). In the Pre group, I-E was non significantly but positively correlated with Johnny's recommended sentence ($r = .08$), and in the Post group this positive correlation reached significance ($r = .14$, $p < .05$).

Our results do counsel caution in the use of personality scales in research. When the I-E scale was administered at the outset of the experiment, it appeared to have a sensitizing effect on the subjects' responses to the subsequently-read case study. Specifically, it induced them to be lenient in attributing blame to Johnny and to curtail their feelings of empathy toward the bystanding and wounded customers. On the other hand, when the I-E scale was administered at the conclusion of the experiment, the minor or severe consequences described in the case study had at least a short-term impact on subjects' control beliefs. It is unclear whether those who read about severe consequences became more externally oriented, whether those who read about minor consequences became more internally oriented, or whether both types of shift occurred. Nonetheless, a strong main effect for accident severity was found in the I-E scores of Post group subjects but not in the scores of subjects in the Pre group (see Table 1). While these shifts in

externality may at first glance seem odd, we, the experimenters, have done a lot of introspecting since first observing them. When we read about a particularly devastating accident--as opposed to a near miss--in our newspapers, we believe we can detect the same sort of external shift occurring within our own minds. Repeated exposure to disaster stories probably does encourage the development of fatalistic beliefs, whereas repeated exposure to "near miss" stories may foster the illusion of control.

As indicated in footnotes, sex differences in AR and other dependent measures were occasionally observed. Ever since Walster's (1966) original study, sex differences have been reported in the AR literature, but these appear to be differences of degree rather than of kind. The most one can say is that men and women sometimes think a bit differently about such things, but the similarities in judgments of this sort usually outweigh the differences.

In conclusion, this research did replicate previous findings in the AR literature but demonstrated once again how susceptible the severity-dependent AR effect is to subtle changes in the content of an accident case study. The theoretical rationale advanced by Schroeder and Linder (1976) seemed best able to account for the results.

FOOTNOTES

1. Only two of these "replication" effects were relevant to the results presented in this paper. One was a Severity x Gender x Replication interaction in AR to Johnny ($F = 4.27$, $1/158$ df, $p < .05$). It reflected the fact that in the 1981 experiment, males generally assigned more responsibility to Johnny in the Severe than in the Minor condition whereas the reverse tendency was found among males in the 1982 experiment. Among females in the 1981 experiment, more responsibility tended to be assigned to Johnny in the Minor than in the Severe condition, but females in the 1982 experiment assigned more blame to Johnny in the latter than in the former condition. Despite these small variations in AR to Johnny, both male and female subjects in both the 1981 and 1982 experiments attributed blame to Johnny in a manner that was consistent with the overall Severity x Prior Record interaction described in Table 2.

The second replication effect was a Severity x Gender x Replication interaction in the sentence recommended for Johnny ($F = 4.45$, $1/158$ df, $p < .05$). Regardless of the year of the experiment or the gender of the subject, a longer sentence was always recommended for Johnny when accident consequences were severe rather than minor. Among males, however, this main effect for Severity was stronger in the 1981 than in the 1982 experiment whereas among females it was stronger in 1982 than in 1981. A Gender x Replication interaction emerged from the fact that males assigned longer sentences than females in 1981 whereas females assigned the longer sentences in 1982 ($F = 4.46$, $1/158$ df, $p < .05$).

The remaining three measures on which we observed interactions involving the Replication factor did not show significant effects for the

Severity and Prior Record variables in the ANOVAs for the two years combined and so did not contribute to our conclusions. These measures were percentage AR to the bystander and to bad luck and beliefs regarding the personal vs. situational instigators of juvenile crime. A Prior Record x Gender interaction did appear in analyses of the bad luck measure, however, and is discussed in Footnote 7.

2. A main effect for Gender indicated that females perceived the accident as more severe than did males ($F = 4.96$, $1/227$ df, $p < .05$).

3. Due to a procedural error in the 1981 experiment, 12 subjects in the Post group did not complete the I-E scale. There was a Prior Record x Pre-Post x Gender interaction in the I-E data ($F = 8.52$, $1/215$ df, $p < .01$). Among males in the Pre group, I-E scores were higher in the Prior ($M = 11.11$) than in the No Prior condition ($M = 8.09$) whereas among males in the Post group, I-E scores were higher in the No Prior ($M = 10.81$) than in the Prior ($M = 7.38$) condition. Among females there was no appreciable Pre-Post difference in the relative size of I-E scores in the No Prior as compared to the Prior condition.

4. In ratings of identification with the role of the wounded customer, there was a significant Severity x Pre-Post x Gender interaction ($F = 4.52$, $1/120$ df, $p < .05$). Males consistently identified more with this party's role in the No Prior than in the Prior condition; this same tendency was observed for females in the Pre group, but among females in the Post group there was a stronger identification with the wounded customer in the Prior than in the No Prior condition.

5. A Severity x Prior Record x Gender interaction arose from the fact that the Severity x Prior Record interaction was more clearly observed in

the data from male subjects, though the pattern of mean scores was predominantly the same for both sexes ($F = 6.86, 1/166 \text{ df}, p < .01$).

6. A Party $\times$ Gender interaction ($F = 5.69, 3/246 \text{ df}, p < .01$) indicated that females assigned more blame to the salesman ($M = 5.90$) and Johnny ($M = 7.28$) than did males ($M = 4.58$ and 6.96 , respectively) but that the sexes did not differ in AR to the two customers.

7. There was a Prior Record $\times$ Gender interaction in percentage AR to bad luck ($F = 6.89, 1/166 \text{ df}, p < .01$). Females assigned a higher percentage to bad luck when Johnny had a prior record ($M = 9.30$) than when he did not ($M = 5.33$) while males made stronger attributions to bad luck in the No Prior than in the Prior condition ($M = 14.31$ and 7.04 , respectively).

8. The degrees of freedom for the externality ANOVA are reduced due to one group of 12 subjects in the 1981 experiment not being given the I-E scale through a procedural error. There was an interaction of the prior record variable with the sex of the subject ($F = 9.10, 1/154 \text{ df}, p < .01$), indicating that for males externality was weaker in the Prior ($M = 7.38$) than in the No Prior ($M = 10.80$) condition whereas for females externality was stronger in the Prior ($M = 10.44$) than in the No Prior condition ($M = 9.81$).

9. Two subjects failed to complete the similarity ratings. A main effect for Gender showed that males felt more similar to Johnny than did females ($F = 4.10, 1/58 \text{ df}, p < .05$).

10. There was a Prior Record $\times$ Gender interaction in self-rated similarity to the salesman ($F = 6.30, 1/58 \text{ df}, p < .02$). Male subjects saw less similarity between themselves and the salesman when Johnny had a prior record ($M = 1.14$) than when he did not ($M = 4.00$) whereas females perceived themselves as more similar to the salesman in the former ($M = 3.81$)

than in the latter condition ($\bar{M} = 3.00$).

11. There were significant Severity x Gender ($F = 7.34, 1/60 \text{ df}, p < .01$) and Prior Record x Gender ($F = 5.06, 1/60 \text{ df}, p < .05$) interactions in subjects' ratings of identification with the salesman's role. It was primarily females who felt better able to identify with this role in the Severe ($\bar{M} = 4.08$) as opposed to the Minor ($\bar{M} = 1.74$) accident condition. Among males, identification with the salesman's role tended to be stronger in the Minor ($\bar{M} = 4.29$) than in the Severe ($\bar{M} = 2.62$) condition. Males identified more strongly with the salesman's role in the No Prior ($\bar{M} = 4.88$) than in the Prior condition ($\bar{M} = 1.71$) whereas the strength of this identification among females was unaffected by Johnny's prior record ($\bar{M} = 2.92$ and 2.78 in the No Prior and Prior conditions, respectively).

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Table 1
Mean Belief in External Locus of Control

Accident Consequences	Pre-Administration Group		Post-Administration Group	
	No Prior Record	Prior Record	No Prior Record	Prior Record
Severe	9.24	10.65	10.32	10.83
(n =)	(17)	(17)	(40)	(42)
Minor	10.16	10.62	9.82	8.24
(n =)	(19)	(16)	(40)	(41)

Note: $F_{\text{Severity} \times \text{Pre-Post}} = 3.55, 1/215 \text{ df}, p = .06$. In a separate ANOVA for the Pre group only, all $F_s \leq 2.31, n.s.$ In a separate ANOVA for the Post group only, $F_{\text{Severity}} = 6.69, 1/154 \text{ df}, p < .01$.

Table 1

Mean Attributed Responsibility
(Post-Administration Group Only)

Prior Record	Accident Consequences	Salesman	Johnny	Bystander	Victim
No Prior	Severe	5.74	7.63	0.33	0.19
	(n =)	(43)			
	Minor	5.26	6.74	0.12	0.28
	(n =)	(43)			
Prior	Severe	4.89	7.38	0.07	0.07
	(n =)	(45)			
	Minor	5.51	7.70	0.21	0.30
	(n =)	(43)			

Note: The higher the mean, the greater the attributed responsibility.
 $F_{\text{Prior} \times \text{Severity}} = 9.41, 1/166 \text{ df}, p < .01$; $F_{\text{Party}} = 515.36, 3/498 \text{ df}, p < .001$. In a separate ANOVA for the No Prior condition only, $F_{\text{Severity}} = 4.62, 1/82 \text{ df}, p < .05$. In a separate ANOVA for the Prior condition only, $F_{\text{Severity}} = 4.97, 1/84 \text{ df}, p < .05$.

Table 2

Mean Recommended Sentence for Johnny
(Post-Administration Group Only)

Accident Consequences	No Prior Record	Prior Record
Severe	15.26	17.73
(n =)	(43)	(45)
Minor	9.16	15.00
(n =)	(43)	(43)

Note: The higher the mean, the longer the
recommended sentence (in months).
 $F_{\text{Severity}} = 12.61, 1/166 \text{ df}, p < .01;$
 $F_{\text{Prior}} = 11.33, 1/166 \text{ df}, p < .01.$